

This testimony is given by  
Sister Rose Wildenhaus, Vice President and co-founder of  
St. Mary Development Corporation

**“Building faith-based holistic communities”**

St. Mary Development Corporation (SMDC) is an independent, faith-based 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation with offices located at 713 W. Grand Avenue, Dayton, Ohio 45406 and 519 Xenia Avenue, Dayton, Ohio 45410. SMDC’s annual report is available for viewing on its web site at [www.stmarydevelopment.org](http://www.stmarydevelopment.org) or by request. SMDC publishes a quarterly newsletter that is also available upon request. SMDC may be reached by calling (937) 277-8149 or by fax (937) 277-8230.

For the past 15 years, Dick McBride and I have worked together to build a strong mission-driven community development organization. Our goal is to provide housing and holistic services to low-income residents in Dayton and the surrounding Montgomery County.

We began our work prompted by the look of hopelessness we saw in the eyes of residents of depressed neighborhoods in East Dayton. SMDC tries to bring hope to declining neighborhoods by empowering people to do all that they’re capable of doing ...to create an environment where all things are possible.

We focus our efforts around these guiding principles: faith in God, firm commitment to the community, development and empowerment of the people, and persistence in purpose. If we feel we’re called by the spirit of God to build a store or house, we believe God will give us what’s necessary to do it, or we wouldn’t be led in that direction.

Throughout its 15 year history, SMDC has extended its outreach and expanded its programming to meet growing needs among Dayton’s poorest. We established Southeast Dayton Housing (SEDH) to serve as general contractor for SMDC construction and rehab projects. It has provided single-family homes, rehab and in-fill housing.

One of our primary goals is the creation of affordable senior housing as a catalyst for neighborhood development. We currently operate five independent-living residences that are home to nearly 600 seniors. Two of our residences are in predominately African-American neighborhoods, and two in largely Appalachian communities. Each building has a generous amount of common space and offers activities that enrich the body, mind and spirit. Our buildings are safe, attractive and homelike. We provide a unique quality of life at an affordable price for low- and middle-income seniors.

To date SMDC has provided more than 2,200 units of affordable housing through rehabilitation and construction of single-family homes and multi-family residences.

In addition to meeting the need for affordable housing, we also focus on providing human services. In 1998 we established East End Community Service Corporation. Its mission is to facilitate opportunities for individuals and families in East Dayton to become and remain educationally competent, physically and socially healthy, and economically stable. The Dayton Daily News, in a Feb. 24, 2002 editorial, stated, "The redevelopment that has gone on (in East Dayton) has been substantive, creative and empowering. The East End Services Corp. has been central to helping improve the neighborhood and the lives of the people who live there." Today EECSC is an independent nonprofit organization.

St. Mary Development places a high priority on collaboration with other nonprofit organizations and with city, state, county and federal agencies. We rely on these partners for assistance with transportation, health care services, nutritional counseling and senior fitness programs. One of the senior facilities even has an in-house grocery store for the convenience of homebound residents.

Partners include Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Sinclair Community College, NeighborWorks® America, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, and several city government agencies. Local churches work with us to provide for residents' spiritual needs. Neighborhood prayer breakfasts, gospel choirs, weekly visits from ministers and residents' Bible study groups all nourish the soul and keep hope and love alive in our residents.

SMDC created the HomeOwnership Center of Greater Dayton. Its mission is to educate and empower residents of Greater Dayton to achieve and sustain homeownership and financial success. To accomplish this mission, the HomeOwnership Center provides a variety of services including:

- Homebuyer Training
- Credit/Budget Counseling
- Home Maintenance Classes
- Financial Fitness Training
- Links to Loans
- Down Payment Assistance
- Reverse Mortgage Counseling
- Assistance to Victims of Predatory Lending
- Referrals to local homeownership programs and resources.

SMDC has been committed to the education of children and adults. Beginning with GED classes and a Head Start program, we have provided facilities for elementary education, adult life skills, adult job training and are cooperating with trade training organizations.

In spite of these achievements, SMDC still has a lot of work to do. Cities don't deteriorate overnight and rebuilding neighborhoods and restoring hope to their people is a lengthy process. SMDC has barely scratched the surface and the resources are not available to address all the present needs. SMDC continues to search for funding to help

achieve its mission. Federal grants to faith-based organizations like SMDC are essential if they are to continue to carry on their work.

Unfortunately, federal grant programs are often intimidating and create impossible barriers for small organizations. Applicants for federal support encounter a dizzying array of statutory and regulatory requirements. Federal grant solicitations are repetitive and long. Immediate reform is required to make the federal grant process welcoming to faith-based organizations.

Federal agencies should use grants to underwrite performance-driven programs that deliver positive, measurable results. Faith-based organizations are usually grassroots and are close to and trusted by neighborhood organizations and neighborhood residents. They have the advantage of knowing firsthand the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our experience with you. We thank you for your interest and support. We are fortunate to have developed into a vital, resourceful organization that is large enough to deal with significant programs that favorably impact the people we serve. We look forward to continuing to practice our mission and serving a diverse population in a caring and dignified manner.